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AUTHOR de Kadt, Emanuel
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the education section of a 1974 study group (GEPE) report commissioned by the Mexican government to consider the problems of unemployment, income distribution, and poverty. The author welcomes the report's broad educational proposals, such as the priority given to rural adult education and rural primary education, as well as many of the specific suggestions made in connection with the priority tasks. However, he argues that such policies are not likely to be successful unless they are based on a more serious concern with data requirements, and that more awareness is needed of the differential needs of different groups and the reasons for the past failure of similar proposals. In his discussion, he focuses mainly on institutional problems related to adult education and on the structures and processes which appear to have hampered rural primary education. (Author/JG)

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DISCUSSION PAPER

at the University of Sussex
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A paper commenting on the education chapter of El Problema Ocupacional en Mexico, a report on employment problems and policies prepared in 1973 for the Mexican Government by the Grupo de Estudio del Problema del Empleo (GEPE)

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN MEXICO: SOME THOUGHTS ON SPECIFIC AND FEASIBLE POLICIES[1]

by
Emanuel de Kadt
June 1974

I.D.S. DISCUSSION PAPER no. 55

Summary

In Mexico, as elsewhere in Latin America, development policies have failed to deal adequately with the problem of unemployment, income distribution and poverty. A study group (GEPE) was recently set up by the Mexican Government to report on these issues, and the Report was discussed at a seminar convened in February 1974 in cooperation with I.L.O. This paper deals with the section on education in GEPE's report. It welcomes the broad proposals on education, such as the priority given to rural adult education and rural primary education, as well as many of the specific suggestions made in connection with those priority tasks. But it argues that policies are not likely to be successful unless they are based on a more serious concern with data requirements than the GEPE Report at times exhibits, and that more care needs to be taken to be aware of the differential needs of different groups, as well as of the reasons for failure of rather similar proposals in the past. It mainly focuses on institutional problems related to adult education on the one hand, and on the structures and processes which appear to have made rural primary education ineffectual on the other.

[1]This paper has benefited from extensive comments on an earlier version by various colleagues of the author at the I.D.S.

1. Introduction

This paper will not attempt to deal with the whole range of important matters of educational policy that arise once employment creation has been identified as a major development goal, nor discuss in detail all the recommendations on education in the GEPE Report. It will merely explore a limited set of questions that seem relevant to what I read as two basic themes of the Report. The first of these is that the employment problem must be seen in the context of poverty, inequality, and social and political marginality. The second follows: policies need to be selective, and concerned to tackle the specific characteristics of such poverty, inequality or marginality as exists in Mexico, aiming particularly at those regions and population groups most in need. I shall mainly be concerned to examine how seriously the education proposals accept this need to be specific and how much emphasis they place, firstly on analysing and 'disaggregating' the existing situation, secondly on formulating policies which stand a chance of being implemented and could hope to be effective in securing their avowed goals; and I shall deal with these questions largely in relation to the two areas (adult education and primary education) given highest priority by GEPE.

2. Target populations

Overall, the Report clearly argues that the most disadvantaged population group in Mexico today is the traditional peasantry, found in considerable concentrations in the most backward States of the country, with some 60% of the total labour force in agriculture seen as belonging to the 'marginal' sector.

A first note of caution about the categorization used. Perhaps it is not very wise to lump together as 'marginals' all kinds of workers in the primary sector whose socio-economic situation shows considerable variation.[2] There are important regional and local differences of tenure arrangements and ownership (related to the major crops produced), leading to markedly distinct employment patterns -

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2. I am indebted to Miguel Sanchez-Padron for bringing this issue to my notice, and for supplying the relevant data.

i.e. there are areas with a very high percentage of small farmers, and others with a high percentage of landless workers. In fact, according to the 1970 census, almost half of the agricultural work-force were landless labourers, i.e. persons for whose children the prospects are non-existence of a future in which they can expect to work the land as independent small farmers.[3]

While the Report in its general diagnosis of the problem distinguishes between those occupied in modern agriculture, those working in traditional agriculture, and those with "marginal occupations" (and I assume that the over two million landless workers fall in the last category), this distinction appears to be lost later on. The general policies for the rural sector, with which I am not concerned here, as well as the policies related to rural education, deal exclusively with the "traditional peasantry" - i.e. the small farmers and minifundistas, and presumably also the ejidatarios. This omission of the landless workers, whose living standards are often worse even than those of the small peasantry, seems to be a rather unfortunate 'oversight'. Though this is more serious in relation to the general thrust of development policy, in the educational field, too, this problem is worth considering.

Currently the prospects for the children from landless families are: landlessness again, poverty, underemployment, and a life of migratory job-seeking. Children from small farming families (including ejidatarios) can also expect poverty and underemployment, but for rather different reasons, more related to low productivity, lack of credit or proper advice, and disadvantageous marketing structures. For all of them the future no doubt depends more on the success of broader development policies than on the nature of their education, and it would be erroneous to believe that educational reform by itself will somehow transform those children's life chances. It may be neither possible nor desirable, in the long run, to halt the general drift to the towns. But if life in the rural areas can become more attractive, more people may be prepared to accept a future for their children there, and fewer youngsters may themselves seek the bright lights of the cities. I shall return below to the influence of education on this process. Here it needs merely to be said that a development process

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3. For Mexico as a whole, 44% of the agricultural labour force are landless labourers (jornaleros). Taking only those States with an agricultural labour force of over 100,000, the percentage of jornaleros ranges from 25 in Yucatan to 58 in Hidalgo. (Mexico, 1972: 285ff.)

(such as the one which Mexico has experienced in recent decades), which increases urban-rural income differentials and divergent longer term prospects for the size of growing real incomes (Todaro, 1971), is not likely to contribute to the retention on the land of the "marginal" rural population, nor to lift them out of poverty. We still have much to learn about the complexities of this whole process.[4] But there can be little doubt that policies will need to be more rather than less refined and diversified, and more rather than less adapted to the conditions prevailing in the different areas, if the "marginal" rural population groups are to improve their life chances and standard of living without moving to the towns. In one region the way to achieve this may be through improved family or ejidal farming. In another region land reform may be a precondition. In a third region family farming may have no future, but agricultural labourers might be able to get higher wages through improved collective bargaining. In some regions, finally, it may simply not be realistic to expect higher rural incomes, and moving away from the land may be the only future for most who are now still at school.

It would, of course, not be feasible or desirable to propose that minute adjustments be made to the primary school curriculum in the light of such variations in the children's occupational prospects. If, however, "Matching employment opportunities and expectations"[5] is to be an important intermediate goal of development policies, then these differences in occupational prospects should at least give pause for thought, even though our capacity to follow up the implications within the educational system may as yet be very small.[6] For the time being much remains to be done to reduce the overall 'urban bias' in rural schools (more about this shortly), and the issues raised by the heterogeneity of the agrarian population may well seem somewhat academic in relation to primary education.

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4. Godfrey (1973) has demonstrated that the reduction of the rural-urban income differential by itself seems to have little impact on migration.

5. The title of the ILO Ceylon Report (ILO, 1971).

6. Mark Blaug (1973) has placed much emphasis on the obstacles within the school system to the kinds of changes implied, and has stressed specifically that most present-day teachers in less developed countries would have considerable difficulty in coping with such changes.

That cannot be said, however, in relation to adult education in the rural areas, which the Report regards as the top priority in the educational field (closely followed by rural primary education). Over a quarter of the total labour force is said to have no formal schooling at all, and illiteracy in the predominantly agricultural states is still very high - (Mexico, 1972: 85ff and 285ff). So the task is considerable. The needs of adults tend to be quite closely tied to their current occupational status (though modified, of course, by the prospects for change from proposed development projects), and adult education programmes must take full account of regional or local differences in the socio-economic situation. There is little in the Report to indicate that this issue has been considered -- in fact, for the issue proclaimed as the educational first priority, the discussion of adult education impresses me as rather sketchy. Let me, then, next turn to this topic.

3. Adult education, rural backwardness and community development

The Report rightly stresses that the problem of creating more productive work in the areas of traditional agriculture needs an integrated local development approach, and that adult education activities should be part of this. Little attention is paid, however, to the organizational problems of community development, to the recruitment and training of personnel, or to the links between the new kind of research on traditional agriculture which the Report wants to stimulate, adult education and local improvement. Obviously I cannot go into all these questions in detail, but it is worth pointing out that in this area, perhaps more than in any other, serious attention remains to be given to the way in which the still rather sketchy proposals would work out in practice.

Let me take as an example one important idea which, it is suggested, would have a considerable impact on the availability of cadres to staff such integrated local development schemes. I refer to the proposal that all higher education graduates should do one year's compulsory social service, preferably in the rural areas, and that these graduates should constitute interdisciplinary teams helping to transform living conditions in the countryside. There is much to be said in favour of this proposal, which obviously opens up a very important range of options. Options such as these have so far been seriously explored in very few societies, most intensively in China (and in Cuba), though more limited

schemes exist in other countries, notably for medical doctors. This comparison with other countries raises two main questions: that of the scope of the scheme, and that of its societal context.

First a few words on scope. "Bonding" of medical graduates for rural service exists in various countries (I know of such schemes in Latin America in Chile and Colombia). This is usually justified on grounds of the high cost to the country of medical education, the high life-time earnings of the average physician, and the need of the country for rural health services. But many medical graduates resent being singled out for this treatment, and GEPE's universal proposal at least overcomes that particular objection. But, in its universality, is it not too ambitious, and too complex to administer? Would it not be better to start more modestly, perhaps in the first place with those careers which most resemble medicine on the combination of criteria mentioned above, such as other health professionals, engineers, agronomists, perhaps architects?

The second problem, societal context, is more serious. In China, the rural service programme is integrated with an educational, socio-economic, and political system (backed by a powerful ideological thrust) which places great emphasis on the merits of the peasantry and which attempts to eliminate conventional urban attitudes of superiority. In Mexico, at present, the situation is almost the polar opposite, and that raises serious doubts about a proposal for large-scale rural service as a means to provide rural development cadres and to raise the educational level of the peasantry.

For the graduates who participate in such a scheme (though they might of course learn from participating) would need to be imbued with attitudes quite different from those that appear to be prevalent today. They would have to work in primitive conditions, with poor and 'simple' peasants, without being dominating and paternalistic, and without transmitting the urban biases, sophisticated aspirations and the contempt for manual work which they have acquired from their own background and education. They would have to show an awareness both of Mexican peasant social organization and cultural values, of structures of land tenure and commercialisation, and of historically important attempts at improvement in the countryside and the reasons for their apparent failure.[7] They would, for example, have to be more

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7. They might even take an interest in previous efforts at getting rural education going as part of rural development, which date back in Mexico to the 1920s and 1930s. See Myers (1965: 35ff).

interested in, and concerned with, the ejidos than the present Report appears to be - which virtually ignores their existence as well as the institutional and political reasons for their lack of success.[8]

Hordes of recent university graduates swarming over the countryside might well turn out to be a pretty mixed blessing. Something different is required, I suspect. The main effort in community adult education and in local development needs to be made much closer to the grass roots. Such a programme should have as its pivots, initially, perhaps only semi-literate members of the peasant communities themselves, working with a dedicated middle level cadre of teachers and supervisors (though here there might be a place for recent graduates from university or possibly from secondary schools).[9] They should aim at helping the peasantry to begin thinking and seeing differently: widening their boundaries of freedom - and firmly and consciously establishing the consideration of alternatives in a peasant's thought-processes (Wharton, 1966:207). This also involves helping him to understand why his needs have not been satisfied so far. This kind of learning embraces often small improvements in agricultural techniques, or health and sanitary practices, through which living standards can begin to rise, while elementary notions of arithmetic and economics can also help in bringing higher incomes. But it may also involve discussing socio-economic or political matters, such as land tenure, trade unionism or the operation of political patronage.

This again underlines that adult education cannot be divorced from the social structure in which it takes place, and that education alone is no solution. The Report makes a similar point when putting forward the notion of multi-purpose organisations in the countryside, where adult education has a chance of being integrated with agricultural extension, health promotion or housing and

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8. It is unfortunate that the Report does not analyze more specifically past failures or weaknesses. To examine the social, political and institutional reasons for such failures is a precondition for examining the feasibility of implementing the Report's own proposals. Past infrastructure improvements or credits have flowed into the areas of modern, commercial agriculture, and irrigation works and policies have invariably benefited the larger farmers. But the Report makes no attempt to examine why the hopes raised by previous new departures, often accompanied by even stronger rhetoric than that used currently, were not fulfilled; why previous government policies, many of which were supposed to benefit precisely those with low incomes, has such minimal effects on the groups living in poverty.

sanitation improvement. But the lack of rural development and the perpetuation of poverty in the past were not just the result of the chance absence of a few appropriate material or human resource inputs. They resulted more from gradual but systematic neglect and 'marginalization' of the peasantry, or from the free play of market forces to the benefit of those with greater market power, and from their louder voices and better connections. Community development, rural adult education, and compulsory rural social service are not going to change this unless simultaneously new channels are opened to counterbalance the forces that have led to underemployment, low productivity, poverty and inequality. If peasants learn about all kinds of changes that are possible, they just may be less inclined to pack up and leave for the towns. But if in those circumstances change and improvement is frustrated, and things continue much as they were, the whole process is likely to lead to an even more massive exodus from the land. We need to be well aware of this.

There are no easy solutions to these problems. But a sine qua non is surely a strong institutional structure (in which the adult education programme is carefully anchored), where the views of peasant representatives really count at all levels of the decision-making process. Such a structure can only emerge in a slow and no doubt laborious process. Inevitably, it will have to be planned from the outside, so that it is set up in such a way that effective links exist with the relevant government agencies. But its vitality must come from inside those communities, from below rather than from above. Rather than imposing the ideas, life-styles and bureaucratic procedures of middle class officials and politicians from the towns, it should come to express the pre-occupations of the people from the countryside. Not that this kind of "decentralisation" is without its problems: over and over we hear of local elites, merchants, landowners, or middle-farmers "capturing" local organisations and using them for their own benefit.[10] Again, the social and political context is important. I know of no prescription guaranteed to work in this respect, but whatever set-up is tried, only the peasants themselves can ultimately generate the kind of pressure needed to ensure the implementation of changes that really favour the rural poor.[11]

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10. See, for example, Fals Borda's analysis of the Latin American cooperative movement (Fals Borda, 1971).

11. I have discussed some of the problems of peasant adult education in adverse socio-political conditions in the final chapters of Catholic Radicals in Brazil (de Kadt, 1970). The ILO Colombia Report (ILO, 1970) also deals with some of the problems of rural education, community development and national planning (see especially Ch.21). Circumstances in these countries are different from those in Mexico, but I think there are some useful lessons in both cases.

One final point needs to be mentioned in this respect. The Report notes on various occasions the scarcity of intermediate ('technical') personnel, and the limited educational opportunities at this level. This problem is also very acute in the rural areas, and unlikely to be solved only by changes in the formal educational system. I have no doubt that there is a gross locational imbalance of physicians, most of whom are found in the major towns, or of agronomists, most of whom work either in the areas of large-scale commercial agriculture, or in the offices of government agencies or fertilizer companies in the capital cities. But physicians or agronomists are not going to do the humdrum jobs that need doing in the rural areas, nor would they be very good at them - not even when they have just finished studying and are on a year's compulsory social service. Those day-to-day tasks will have to be undertaken by people with lower or middle-level skills, such as health auxiliaries or assistant agricultural extension officers. Though the skills have to be 'imported' into the rural communities, the people need not, and it should be a basic principle of the new approach to build the skill pyramid up from the bottom. Community development means constant teaching, training and learning - and those who have mastered the skills necessary to be, for example, a voluntary community health worker, should be encouraged and helped to continue their training to become nursing auxiliaries, and so on, at all levels. In this way we would have a genuinely 'open' educational system, right from the base, would produce more sorely needed lower and middle level skilled personnel, and perhaps even contribute to the emergence of more positive, team-oriented and 'unexclusive' attitudes among those in positions of responsibility.

4. Rural primary education

There is little quarrel in principle with the view that the full cycle of primary education should be made available to all children in the countryside, nor with many of the associated specific points: to lower the percentage of repeaters or deserters; to get better (or retrained) teachers in the rural areas; to allow for more flexibility in the school timetable; to set up special incentive schemes or salary differentials (though I would hope these would be aimed at retaining good rural people in the countryside, rather than bringing a flood of townsfolk into the rural areas). But such proposals need a firm anchoring in a detailed examination of existing problems and need to inspire confidence that they will be able specifically to deal with the groups most in want. I have some doubts on those counts.

We are told, for instance, that only about two-thirds of the demand for rural primary education is at present satisfied, and that a large proportion of those who do not go to school are drop-outs rather than children who have never attended school at all. The Report quotes only a small part of the statistics available on such issues, and I would have preferred to see them used even if much is based on data of doubtful accuracy and reliability (it might at least have given rise to a discussion of the kinds of research needed to plan properly). Let me give an example. As far as I know, no large-scale cohort analysis has been undertaken in Mexico, but one gets a rough measure of comparative drop-out rates for urban and rural areas from the number of children who, in 1970, finished 6th grade in relation to the number who started six years earlier. While in the urban areas that proportion was about 55%, in the rural areas it was less than 9% (CEE, 1971:33). And some idea of the preponderance of the youngest children in the country's rural primary schools is given when we read that almost two-thirds of all children on the register were to be found in grades 1 and 2 combined (CEE, 1971:56).

But I know of no precise figures on repetition rates, or on the proportion of rural children who leave school with no more than two or three grades officially tucked under their belts (i.e. children who do not manage to pass to the higher grades). There now appears to be international consensus that a child needs as a minimum about four years of schooling to become functionally literate and to have a chance of remaining so. Whatever the precise length of time required in Mexican conditions, surely the first priority, after ensuring that the school system makes the minimum number of grades available to all children, is to raise the proportion of students who actually stay on for the full (four?) years. Those who leave the schools with less do, of course, figure in the educational statistics. But we can be fairly sure that their schooling has done them hardly any good and that the nation's resources have been almost completely wasted on them.[12] Rather than suggest to the Federal Government that it continue with crash programmes to expand all primary schools to the complete cycle, we should ask some hard questions (and do some serious research) about ways to make primary education really stick for the disadvantaged rural groups.

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12. The ILO Ceylon Report has a table showing the number of "pupil-years" required to produce one graduate of the first cycle of secondary school (GCE 'O' level) (ILO, 1971:134). I wonder how many pupil-years it takes in Mexico, at present, to produce one child who has passed, say, grade 4 or grade 6 (full primary).

For example, what of the link between repetition and drop-out, and where does one find the highest repetition and drop-out rates? Is it in those areas where the schools at present have an incomplete number of grades, or where one teacher takes a number of classes - or are these proportions more influenced by socio-economic factors such as poverty of the community, or distance from the nearest town? And are there marked differences from one state to the next? El Colegio de Mexico has done fairly extensive research for the Ministry of Education into questions such as these: it is a pity that the results remain unpublished and that GEPE has apparently been unaware of their existence. In any case, no policy aimed at those most in need can be formulated or implemented until we do know more about these matters.

The Report believes it is urgent to reduce repetition and drop-out. But how is it proposed to achieve this? Repetition basically results from failure in exams; exams tend to favour those from culturally and economically more advanced (and more urban) backgrounds; and so on, in a vicious circle. Moreover, as both the ILO Ceylon and Kenya Reports have emphasized, preparation for exams has a negative back-wash effect on teaching and learning and makes children ill-prepared for participation in the labour force. Exam-orientation of the school system, in a situation of increasing levels of education of the labour force, reinforces the tendency of employers to force up the minimum paper qualification required for any one job: a tendency which, according to the Report, also exists in Mexico.

In a recent report of ECAFE, selection by examinations is analyzed in considerable detail. It is pointed out that "wastage" (which also fulfills the function of cutting down the proportion of an age-group to the percentage which can be absorbed into the next higher level of education, or into jobs for which different levels of qualification are required) can occur in two ways. Either wastage (drop-out) is gradual almost from the first year of primary education, or children are kept in school with automatic promotion for a fixed time span of, say, six years, and then deliberately selected to limit the numbers proceeding to the next cycle. The Mexican profile of cohort retention is one in which gradual wastage occurs from the first year, and in the rural schools the proportion of the age group still enrolled in grade 4 is discouragingly small. In Asia it is the least developed countries (as measured by GNP per capita) which exhibit wastage from the first year: those with higher levels of national income - but on the whole still lower than that of Mexico! - are more likely to have automatic promotion during the primary cycle, with a fairly steep drop between primary and secondary schools (UN, ECAFE 1974: 114-121).

The Mexican system, with state-wide exams in primary school even for passing from one grade to the next is, from a comparative perspective, extraordinarily exam-oriented. If there were to be an attempt significantly to raise the proportion of children who get a viable minimum of education, automatic promotion at least till the fifth year might be worth considering.[13] After that selectivity might begin - though not necessarily by means of conventional tests of achievement, which are now increasingly thought to discourage genuine "education" of children through the exam-oriented attitudes promoted both in teachers and pupils (Dore, 1972). What all this suggests, at the very least, is a serious reconsideration of Mexico's primary selection system, and its exclusive emphasis on exams. I recognise that the issue of achievement v. aptitude testing is a complicated one, and that change away from traditional exams, however desirable, is likely to be slow (Blaug, 1973:66 ff). In this connection I may have misunderstood the Report's suggestion of a national evaluation system to ensure the academic equivalence of diplomas and certificates in different regions of the country. But it seems to me almost bound to reinforce the negative tendencies of the present system, with its inequality in selection, repetition and drop-out, reward of rote learning and unimaginative teaching, and especially the urban bias in the curriculum, a problem on which the Report has nothing to say beyond the very general statement that part of the curriculum might be regionally differentiated (but presumably remain uniform for town and country within the region).

Much has been written on the existence of urban bias in the schools of countries where a large proportion of the population remains rural. A first matter that has been considered is the extent to which rural schools with 'urban' curricula make children want to migrate to the towns (and conversely, whether more 'rural' curricula help retain the children on the land). I have pointed out above that the tendency to migrate appears to be influenced to a greater extent by non-educational factors than by what happens in the schools, though Godfrey has pointed out in a recent article that (at least in Africa) education <u>does</u> seem to have an independent effect on the decision to migrate, specifically because attendance at school <u>beyond a certain level</u> becomes a kind of "ticket to the town"

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13. Automatic promotion cannot be a viable policy unless school attendance is truly regular, with children absenting themselves only for "genuine" reasons such as sickness. In many places the provision of a school meal (or school milk) appears to have had a considerable impact on attendance. I have seen no data on school attendance in Mexican rural areas: they need to be examined (or collected) before a policy decision on this issue can be made.

(Godfrey 1973:70f).[14] We can say, therefore, that without an improvement in rural earning opportunities and living conditions migration will surely occur; but if the prospects for those on the land are getting better, then it is important to give further consideration to the structure and content of education, as these can apparently help or hinder in the retention of children in the rural areas.

Hence the significance of the difficult discussions on how to make the curriculum more relevant to those on the land. Arguments based on equality of opportunity (i.e., rural children must have the same chances of moving up through the system as urban children, from which follows the need for identical curricula) are with some justification put forward against the suggestion that rural schools should be teaching a different range of subjects, as this would only accentuate urban superiority (UNESCO, 1970).[15] At the same time it is recognised that the urban orientation of curricula leads to special problems in comprehension for rural children (who lack personal experience to make sense of the lessons), and fails to prepare them for a more productive life on the land, or for active participation in rural development programmes.[16] The uselessness (especially in an exam-oriented system) of simply adding on a bit of vocational work in agriculture has been paraded for us extensively, and that is clearly no solution (Foster, 1966). UNESCO has, in recent times, published some very thoughtful papers on the issues involved, which examine such matters as the possibilities of giving a more rural orientation to the curricula of all schools, including those in towns, or the actual implementation of changes that would move schools away from "the dreary, oral tradition of teaching", as Blaug calls it (Blaug, 1973:53) to a "localized" tackling of the national curriculum, integrated with the day-to-day experience of life in the countryside (UNESCO, 1970 & 1971).

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14. For a further discussion of these issues, see Connell et al. (1974) and also Blaug (1973:46ff).

15. In this connection the distinction between education which prepares children for the next cycle (preparatory education), and education which prepares children for leaving school and entering the labour force (terminal education) may be useful (UN, ECAFE, 1974:168ff). Clearly some education must be preparatory for all (four or six years?).

16. On one occasion in 1972 I visited a rural primary school in the Estado de Mexico. The teachers were bussed in every day from the State capital.. The lesson in one class dealt with water. A pretty wall chart showed an urban middle-class bungalow, and all the ways in which it uses water: from the hydraulic toilet to the complex filter for purifying water and the sprinkler system in the garden.

Complex as these questions are, with any change putting a heavy burden on the teachers, they merit more attention than GEPE's proposed policies appear to suggest. Mexico is spending some 3% of its GNP on education, but from all accounts the benefits to individual and society are very doubtful of that part which is spent on schooling in the countryside. Many of the Report's recommendations are sensible enough, but one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that because of the absence of really probing questions on many essential issues, for the rural areas the result of its exhortations will mainly be "more of the same".

5. Notes on secondary education and beyond

There is much to be said for the policy objective of decreasing the pressure on secondary education in the major towns, e.g. by a reduction of indiscriminate subsidies. But the implementation of the proposal to make available three years of secondary education to all children in towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants could easily accentuate 'qualification escalation' and lead employers to insist on basic secondary school leaving certificates for all but the most menial jobs. If that were to happen, one would have to expect a worsening of regional or class-based inequalities - because on all past evidence the school system (whatever its proclaimed intention) could not successfully provide for all comers, and drop-outs and repeaters would be found disproportionately among those with the 'poorest' backgrounds.

Having said that, I fully endorse the proposals to de-emphasize all too specific skill-training (adiestramiento), and to concentrate in the formal educational system on general abilities and background skills (capacitación). We should also strongly support any reform which makes the educational system more open, so that students can leave, having learned something useful, and return without fuss after a period outside.

Whatever the difficulties of the newly fashionable idea of 'permanent' or 'recurrent' education, there is little doubt that the underlying principle is widely supported (Blaug, 1973:57ff & 72ff). A person who returns to education, to participate in study that meets his specific work needs, is likely to be properly motivated and more likely to get good value for money than one who simply stays on and ambles from one level to the next. The far-reaching proposals in this respect of the ILO Ceylon Report, though dealing with a different situation, are not irrelevant to Mexico (ILO, 1971:140ff).

Especially the suggestion in the Ceylon Report that there should be a break between the end of secondary education and the beginning of higher education might well be adaptable to Mexican conditions, perhaps in conjunction with the proposed compulsory social service year. In line with what was said above (section 3), less highly skilled persons are more needed and more likely to be of real help in the countryside than doctors, architects and engineers. In the first place those secondary school graduates who have chosen certain careers (section 3) and have applied for a scarce university place could be required to give, say, six months of social service, working at simpler tasks in the broad area in which they intend to study: e.g., as health volunteers, building assistants, primary school teachers or secretaries to community committees. Such service would be a pre-condition for acceptance in a higher educational institution, and would give prospective professionals something of an idea of the practical problems at the lower levels in their field. A further period might be required after completion of higher education, as a pre-condition for being allowed to exercise a profession or receive one's degree.[17] If such a proposal were accepted, it might also facilitate reforms in university curricula aimed at making higher education more relevant to national conditions, by linking university teaching to the compulsory social service scheme. Those reforms would presumably embrace not only content (the favourite pastime of all university teachers is to think up new courses), but also methods of teaching - with special emphasis placed on the need to familiarise students thoroughly and at first hand with the problems encountered in the countryside or the low income urban areas. Really knowing what to do about infant diarrhoeas or being able to design a poor man's dwelling may be less spectacular than performing open heart surgery or building a skyscraper, but it is certainly of more use to a greater number of people.

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17. There are various precendents in other countries for this, especially in the field of medicine - thus Chile requires three years of rural medical service, and Colombia one year. Cuba now requires three years of everyone - thus removing the (minor) discrimination against persons in particular occupations which rankles in some countries.

6. A brief comment on education for the 'informal sector'

The Report has little love to spare for those activities (discussed mainly in relation to the tertiary sector of the economy) which it regards as harbingers of low productivity and underemployment, and which are mainly seen as the last refuge for the unskilled migrants from the countryside. The employment strategy proposed, though it accepts the need for increased attention to the backward rural areas, focusses essentially on an expansion of the manufacturing sector, mainly in intermediate and capital goods. I am no economist and do not presume to judge its economic feasibility. But if past experience, in Mexico and elsewhere, is anything to go by, it will only be a partial solution. Those 'unproductive' activities (engaged in by unorganised workers) will be with us for a long time to come, and massively. But are they really all that unproductive? The ILO Kenya Report has made much of the importance of the so-called "informal sector", whose activities often escape the notice of the statisticians, and whose labour force tends to be harassed and persecuted by licence-mad petty officials. The relevant sections are well worth reading. After studying the present Report I would guess that in Mexico, too, a revolution in attitudes towards this sector is needed, which should receive much more support and recognition than hitherto. And there are implications for the educational system in the fact that a large proportion of the students will not find regular wage employment, but are likely to go through life making do for themselves, or helping their parents in this. These implications urgently need to be explored.

7. Final comment

This paper has mainly focussed on data requirements in particular areas of education, on the need to be thoroughly aware of Mexico's own historical experience and also of relevant comparative situations in other countries, and on the urgency to be concerned with the specific and heterogeneous problems of different target groups. In doing so it has at times been rather critical of certain aspect of the GEPE Report. I trust that this has not concealed the fact that I greatly recommend implementation of the broad lines of policy proposed. With these I thoroughly agree - as I do with the underlying spirit of the Report.

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